

REVIEWS

Content-Based Second Language Instruction by Donna M. Brinton, Marguerite Ann Snow, and Marjorie Bingham Wesche. New York: Newbury House, 1989.

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Why is it necessary to talk about "content-based language teaching?" One of the main things people do with language is express propositions about the world. Language is normally used to talk or write about things, and in educational contexts it is often *about* bodies of knowledge. How is it possible, then, to teach language which is *about* nothing in particular? Alas, as we all know, "contentless" language teaching is all too common. It has been a long struggle to establish the idea of "meaningful communication" within the major traditions of foreign language teaching; and even within these communicative traditions, what students are asked to talk *about* is still not as important to teachers and materials writers as *why* they should communicate and *how* they should form their utterances. In most foreign language teaching, content is just not a primary determinant of syllabus design in the way that function and structure are.

This is not to say that content-based language teaching does not exist. As the authors of *Content-Based Second Language Instruction* point out, it has its vigorous traditions: some communicative general-purpose EFL work--especially at post-intermediate level--has a content-led syllabus; domain knowledge is also a central component in much of ESP. More interestingly, from the educational point of view, *second* language learning for children in nursery, primary, and secondary education, whose home language is not the medium of instruction, is in the U.K. and many other parts of the world becoming content-led. As the education of ethnolinguistic minority pupils is relocated from withdrawal classes

to the mainstream classroom, ESL is no longer language teaching; its concerns are the development in the child's second language of those cognitive abilities needed to come to grips with the curriculum. This focus is very remote from the structural or functional syllabus. In a similar way, immersion education in Canada has not paid much attention to language syllabuses and the traditional methodological accoutrements of foreign language teaching; and this is often true--as we in the West are all too inclined to forget--of every context in the world where primary, secondary, and tertiary education are conducted through the medium of a second or third language.

Finally, of course, the teaching of second languages for academic purposes (which I will refer to, however reluctantly, as SLAP) can also be content-based, and this is largely what this book is about. It discusses how we should teach second language students the language they need to study academic content subjects in tertiary education. The authors present three solutions to the language and content problem in the context of teaching languages for academic purposes: "theme-based language instruction"--a topic-led version of communicative language teaching; "sheltered content instruction"--content teaching by content specialists, delivered (with the concomitant interactional adjustments) to non-native speakers; and "adjunct language instruction"--a linking of content and language courses, the latter being taught by language specialists to second language learners, the former by content specialists to a mix of both native and nonnative speakers.

Each of these three models is presented through examples. Theme-based language instruction is described, in an ESL context, at UCLA (ESL adults attending evening English classes) and, in an EFL context, at the Free University of Berlin (German university students learning undergraduate English). Sheltered content instruction is exemplified by the University of Ottawa, which offers sheltered instruction in, for example, psychology to students studying through either French or English as a second language. Adjunct language instruction is represented by the UCLA Freshman Summer Program, in which ESL freshmen follow linked ESL and content courses. A case study in the development of a content-based program is also presented through the example of a course at the Social Science English Language Center in Beijing. The three models are discussed in some detail with relation to such features as materials, methodology, staffing, logistics, evaluation, and appropriacy to context. A good deal of space (about a third of the book) is taken up by examples of content-based materials from

adjunct-type courses, and there is also a detailed consideration of evaluation in content-based courses with sample assessment tasks.

The authors take the view that since a fair amount of language teaching goes on but not much is written about it, their book fills this gap. They also see these forms of teaching as interesting in terms both of second language acquisition and of general developments in language in education. In these respects I believe they are right. SLAP teaching exists in a multiplicity of forms and badly needs the kind of conceptualizing framework which this book offers. The book also fills our need for detailed documentation of high-quality SLAP operations, such as those the authors describe. Furthermore, a good deal of this sort of teaching is often poorly funded, poorly staffed, and poorly understood. This book, in contrast, shows that when it is done well, content-based language instruction is pedagogically and administratively a sophisticated endeavor. Moreover, since the book is rich in detailed samples of materials, it should prove to be a gold mine of purely practical ideas for teachers who support second language students in content areas.

The issue I would like to raise, however, is one which, to be fair to the authors, this book does not set out to discuss: is content-based language instruction the whole answer to the educational needs of second language learners? Should we not be looking instead--or at least in addition--at the way teaching is conceived of for all students in higher education? Is the link between language and content a language learner's problem, or is it more fundamentally an institutional problem?

Like anyone concerned with the relationship between language and content, the authors are constantly faced with the question of whether these two things are divisible. On this issue teachers in general tend to fall easily into what I will call "separatist" and "integrationist" camps. The separatist majority see themselves as "content teachers": from pre-school to tertiary education (but increasingly as we ascend this scale), they describe curricula in terms of domain knowledge; yet they regard the language and learning processes which are the medium for acquiring this knowledge as separable from it, and they consider the pedagogical skills needed to facilitate these processes to be the responsibility of another teacher. In the integrationist camp are the minority who believe that we construct our knowledge of a domain by engaging with it in ways which highlight not the transmission of facts but the development of cognitive and communicative processes: take care

of these language and learning processes, they believe, and content knowledge will take care of itself. In this view, there is no such thing as a "content" teacher; the way to teach "subjects" is to take full responsibility for preparing our learners to meet the language and learning demands which the subject domain makes on them.

Higher education tends to be a stronghold of the separatist camp, for its conventions encourage teachers to concentrate much more on *what* students learn than on *how* they learn it. In the favored loci of this process, such as the lecture or the seminar, learning is cognitively demanding: it takes place in the absence of many of the cognitive props which normally situate learning in a context and a culture in everyday life and in the earlier years of schooling. In higher education, learning is thus particularly difficult for second language users, but it is also difficult for everyone.

How do the specific insights of this book bear on this more general learning issue? Second language teachers working in content areas understand that, at least as far as second language acquisition is concerned, language and content go together. The authors are properly unambiguous on this point: "The focus for students is on acquiring information via the second language and, in the process, developing their academic language skills" (p. 2). They also show how these processes can develop only within a certain facilitating environment, of which they demonstrate three types. All three possess certain characteristics: one is that the content curriculum should determine the language uses which are learned; another is (especially in sheltered programs) that input and interactional adjustments to academic discourse are necessary to help second language users acquire both language and content together; a third (especially in the adjunct model) is that a repertoire of support activities is required to make salient for the second language user certain of the key discourse features and skills needed for academic language use. SLAP teachers prefer to locate their work on the boundaries of the mainstream curriculum--neither wholly within nor wholly outside it--where they can work within the content program but at the same time apply the facilitating influence of their expertise. The authors thus place their three models at different points on a continuum which bridges the gap between language class and content class. In this view SLAP does indeed provide "shelter" for second language learners while they prepare themselves for the harsher climate of the mainstream classroom.

Insofar as the difficulties of second language learners in post-secondary education derive from incomplete language ability,

then the solutions presented in this book are an articulate and sophisticated account of the kinds of good language teaching practice which ought to become more widespread. If, however, as I suggest, what second language students are up against is just as much a question of backward pedagogical traditions right across this sector of education, then the insights of SLAP teachers should be taken up by the mainstream curriculum and used to the benefit of all. Anyone who has worked in SLAP knows that a pedagogical environment which is facilitative in terms of second language acquisition tends also to be facilitative in terms of ordinary cognitive development. Take for instance what second language acquisition theory tells us about the features of a good SLA environment: contextualized input, communicative need, opportunity to negotiate meaning, opportunity to initiate interactions, freedom from stress, order in the learning process, and so on. Consider also the rich variety of learning procedures--amply demonstrated in this book--which teachers of SLAP regularly inculcate: note-taking, researching sources, editing, academic reading, organization of written discourse, interaction in academic contexts--in short, the whole gamut of study skills. Very little of all this is exclusive to second language learning; most of it is basic to good learning in general. It is also the recurrent experience of teachers of SLAP that a good content teacher is often also a facilitative teacher of second language learners; that when second language students find a teacher difficult to understand, he is probably a strain on native-speaker students too; that good SLAP materials are often just what native-speaker students need; and that a SLAP teacher who influences a mainstream teacher to alter her style of teaching is probably doing *all* the students a favor.

It is, however, a classical predicament of content-based language teachers that their work leaves mainstream pedagogical traditions largely intact. Although they take an integrationist view of the relationship between language and content, the realities of institutional traditions in which they work often limit them to providing language-supportive environments on the sidelines of the mainstream university classroom and inhibit them from extending their pedagogical influence further across the tertiary curriculum to the benefit of the sector as a whole. Nevertheless, within these constraints they have considerable pedagogical achievements to their credit, as this book testifies. But the ways forward will require them to become even more integrationist and to admit not only that content-based language teaching is good for second language

students, but that language-facilitative content teaching is better for everybody.

How then can teachers of languages for academic purposes shift their concerns into the mainstream of higher education? Essentially they must ask more questions. This book provides satisfying answers to one question: How can language teachers construct environments in which second language learners can learn language through content? But here the authors stop. We ought to, however, go further, and thus a second question must be: Which other teachers in the institution can provide similar environments? The carefully constructed context provided by the SLAP teacher is only one of a multiplicity of facilitative language and learning environments which any educational institution offers. Moreover, although this specific environment is necessary for many non-native speakers, not all will need it. Indeed some, even with limited ability in the language of instruction, will be able to learn adequately in many other language-sensitive mainstream classrooms in departments across the institution. A third question therefore also presents itself: What characterizes a mainstream classroom in which second language learners can flourish? The answer has to do with both subject and teaching style. Some curricular domains, as proponents of sheltered teaching know, are capable of being taught in a style which is less linguistically demanding and more contextually supportive than others; the natural sciences are a good example. Some teachers adopt a style which combines facilitative teacher-talk, opportunities for task-focused small-group work, visual support, support for academic reading and writing, and overall orderliness in the teaching process. Some teachers, moreover, are more open than others to the needs of second language learners. Once we locate these classrooms, we can get more second language students more quickly into mainstream learning.

A final, and fundamental question is: How can the institution as a whole become more aware of learning as a process and the role of language within it? Many different interest groups concern themselves with this question and will provide natural allies of content-based language teachers in the search for answers. What is important, then, is that we should try increasingly to see the problems faced by second language learners as one manifestation of larger educational issues: one is that teachers do not have a clear enough understanding of learning and especially of the role of language as a part of learning; another is that learning tends to be

seen more as the transmission of content as one progresses through the secondary and tertiary sectors. Unlike in cognitive science and the study of education, the practical traditions of post-secondary education do not sufficiently recognize that discourse processes seem to go hand in hand with cognitive processes. As long as this is so, learning will continue to be more difficult than it need be for all learners, but especially for second language learners.

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Linguistics in a Systemic Perspective edited by James D. Benson, Michael J. Cummings, and William S. Greaves. Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1988. x + 441 pp. Amsterdam Studies in the Theory and History of Linguistic Science, Series IV, Current Issues in Linguistic Theory. General Editor: E.F. Konrad Koerner.

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This collection of thirteen articles illustrates how a diverse range of linguistic interests and concerns (intonation, grammar and lexis, semantics, lexicography, discourse and semiotics, anthropology and artificial intelligence) are handled within the theoretical approach known as systemic functional linguistics, largely based on the work of M.A.K. Halliday. Readers unfamiliar with systemic linguistics but with a fair knowledge of transformational generative theory will find here quite a different view of language. It is beyond both the scope of this review and the ability of this reviewer to conduct an in-depth comparison between systemic linguistics, on the one hand, and transformational generative theory, which has largely been concerned with sentences rather than with texts and text/context relations, on the other. However, an attempt will be made to highlight some of the ways in